



## ESSAYS AND POETRY

### Novelist Puts Grammar Last

THE MAN IN THE STREET. By Meredith Nicholson. Charles Scribner's Sons.

THIS collection of essays contains a paper called "The Poor Old English Language" that we should like to reprint word for word in a bold type. Our next step would be to send clippings to every board of education in America. For in this essay Meredith Nicholson utters some great truths on the subject of teaching English in our schools.

"I doubt seriously," says the author, "whether I could pass an examination in English grammar. . . . At times in my life I have been able to read Greek, Latin, Italian and French without ever knowing anything about the grammar of either of these languages beyond what I worked out for myself as I went along. This method . . . is not original with me, for there are inductive methods of teaching foreign languages which set the student at once to reading and make something rather incidental of the grammar. This is precisely what I should do with English if I were responsible for the instruction of children at the age when it is the fashion to begin hammering grammar into their inhospitable minds. Ignorant of grammar myself, but having—if I may assume so much—an intuitive sense of the proper and effective manner of shaping sentences, there would be no textbooks in my schoolroom. . . . The first weeks of my course would be purely conversational. I should test the students for their vulgarities and infelicities, and such instances, registered on the blackboard, would visualize the errors as long as necessary. The reading of indubitably good texts in class would, of course, be part of the programme, and the Bible I should use freely, particularly drawing upon the Old Testament narratives. . . . When a youngster is made to understand from a concrete example that

a sentence is badly constructed the rules governing such instances may be brought to his attention with every confidence that he will understand their point. . . . Let the example precede the rule! If there is any sense in the rule the example will clarify it; if it is without justification and designed merely to befuddle the student, then it ought to be abolished anyhow."

We are tempted to go on and on and quote the whole essay in accordance with the wish expressed above. In placing this piece last in the collection the author puzzles it. It should come first and the book should be called "The Poor Old English Language, and Other Papers," regardless of how lengthy and unwieldy a title that may be.

Mr. Nicholson gives first place in his collection to an essay called "Let Main Street Alone!" in which he makes a defence of "Main Street" that sounds convincing enough but not particularly novel. Of Carol Kennicott and the inhabitants of "Main Street" he says: "They didn't need her uplifting hand! They were far more valuable members of society than she proved herself to be, for they worked honestly at their jobs and had, I am confident, a pretty fair idea of their rights and duties, their privileges and immunities, as children of democracy." This is the obvious thing for any one to say who does not agree with Sinclair Lewis. Our statistical secretary reports that 3,417,219 other people have said the same thing during the last six months.

Other essays in the book are "The Cheerful Breakfast Table," "The Boulevard of Rogues," "The Open Season for American Novelists," "The Church for Honest Sinners," "The Second Rate Man in Politics," "The Lady of Lander Lane" and "How, Then, Should Smith Vote?" All of these make entertaining and instructive reading with the exception of "The Open Season for American Novelists," written in 1915. To us this essay is like last year's straw hat.

XAVIER LYNDON.

### Hang the Moon In the Highest Tree

OUT OF MIST. By Florence Kilpatrick Mixer. Boni & Liveright.

THIS thin little volume contains some very lovely poetry and the author is already known to many by her contributions to current magazines. Here she has collected those which she likes best herself, and heads them with a sonnet sequence which gives the book its name. She has made graceful use of the sonnet form and there are some



Florence Kilpatrick Mixer.

fine lyric lines, with above all a strong feeling of sincerity. Her best work is undoubtedly among the shorter poems that follow, where we find some exquisite bits. *Prologue*, for instance, shows her delicate and fanciful imagination. It begins:

Paint the sky midnight black. Hang the moon  
In the highest tree.  
Scatter the flowers of June  
Irretrievably.

All the verse has the charm of simplicity, and most of it is characterized by a wistful sadness, such as we find in *Elegy* or *In Memory Of*. Unfortunately there is not room to quote all of *Cradle Song*, one of the loveliest, and we can only suggest the author's joyous love of children by giving the second stanza of *To a Child*:

You are my heart that dances,  
You are my soul that leaps.  
You have hidden the key of the lonely  
Where my troubled spirit sleeps.

### Ocean Rhythms In Storm and Calm

SEA POEMS. By Cale Young Rice. The Century Company.

THIS volume confirms the place of Cale Young Rice among the leading American lyric poets of the day. Composed as it is primarily of reprints from previous works, this latest collection shows Mr. Rice in no new aspect; but it has the merit of gathering together much of what is best in his poetry, and therefore of exhibiting him in his most favorable light. As the name implies, the book is composed of poems dealing in some way with the sea; it portrays the sea in all its phases, from the monsoon of the Indian Ocean to the storms of the North Atlantic, from the mystery and terror of submarine mountains to the serenity of meditation over a freely on a summer shore.

In spite of the dramatic tendencies manifested in his poetic plays, Mr. Rice's talent seems to be primarily lyrical; and though his work is marred by too obvious echoes of Shelley and Swinburne, though it is occasionally lacking in vitality and is sometimes careless in construction, yet it has an unmistakable singing quality, a rhythm and a grace of expression that make a strong appeal to the emotions as well as to the ear. In style and theme his lyrics are considerably varied. Compare these two stanzas, one a love song out of the heart and the other a piece of pure nature music:

When we two walk, my love, on the path  
The moon makes over the sea,  
To the end of the world where sorrow  
bath

An end that is ecstasy,  
Should we not think of the other road  
Of wearying dust and stone  
Our feet would fare did each but care  
To follow the way alone?

The quivering terns dart wild and dive  
As the tide comes tumbling in.  
The calm rock pools grow all alive,  
With the tide tumbling in.

The crab who under the brown weed  
creeps,  
And the small who lies in his house  
Awake and stir, as the plunging  
waves

Of the tide come tumbling in.  
Tumbling throughout Rice's sea poetry is a philosophic strain, not profound, yet evidently born of a sincere reaction to the wonder and majesty of the ocean. Confronted with unfathomable mysteries, he realizes that the How and Wherefore of all things are beyond his grasp, and instead of a world born of the chance upheaval of blind though gigantic forces he chooses to see a universe with a spiritual basis for its existence.

The old faith that God is, though all unproved;  
The old faith that though gulfs within  
The soul, and knowledge drown within  
their deep,  
There is no world that wanders—no, not  
one  
Of all the millions—that He does not  
keep.

MARGARET L. BURKE.

### Capt. Mayne Reid Boy's Delight

BOOKS AND FOLKS. By Edward N. Teall. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

EDWARD N. TEALL has not been content to be simply a polite adventurer among masterpieces, a slave to lists of the "hundred best." He has gone jauntily forth into the vast land of cantos and chapters, a veritable vagabond among books, or, as he himself expresses it, a species of literary bumble bee. He has mot and tilted with them all, whether garbed in paper or cloth. Mayne Reid to Goethe, Oliver Optic to Laurence Sterne. The result is the charming reminiscences of an "omnivorous reader."

"I can see it now, that room; dark and cheerless like a cave," he says of one period of his boyhood. "The student at his desk, poring over his dusty theologic tome. Outside, in the snowy street, a gloomy horse propped in the shafts of a grocer's delivery wagon. 'Small town stuff'—and the old clock measuring off the slow minutes while I, in ecstatic loneliness, read Mayne Reid. Perhaps it is the dim but blessed memory of that clock that I cherish as much as that of Mayne Reid. Dim but blessed are the memories of the omnivorous reader."

The youthful Teall was no bookworm. He engaged in all the pranks of his "gang," and was a member in good standing on the rolls of the Hercules Athletic Club, from whose soap box library he drew with great frequency.

The librarian's opportunity to be of service is pointed out by the author in a pair of well turned sentences: "Unaided the seeker after improvement may uncover some small nuggets to go into the mill of his mind, there to be assimilated, absorbed into his own substance and used as new

muscle to an extent dictated and measured by his inherent powers, his persistence, imagination—and his fortune, good or bad. How much waste of labor—opening of false veins, handling of worthless material—may be saved from by a friendly, helpful word from the librarian, who knows the tools and their use and presumably the fruitful places wherein he may advantageously invest his toil."

Mr. Teall delivers himself of a little apostrophe to his old college library in these words: "Oh, little home of my heart, where were kept the older volumes, the books tried and true, the standard books and classics, the tomes full of faith and philosophy and distilled experience; . . . you mothered my mind, you gave me what I got of education. You did not dictate, you did not give marks for excellence and 'conditions' for inefficiency; you opened your chests and ran the risk of plundering by unworthy hands rather than chance withholding the contents of your treasures from deserving questers."

The author discusses every phase of reading. He deals with the newspaper in a broad, enlightened manner which is fitting in one who spent years at the editorial desk. The value of magazines and the function of book reviewers and reviews are discussed with a calmness and a reflectiveness that soothes and pleases.

To the reader he gives this advice: "Don't be bullied and browbeaten by critics. Don't let highbrows bluff you. Don't accept a Standard of Taste till you have tested it. Don't be ashamed of what you like. Don't pretend to like what you don't like. Don't be a slave. Don't be a hypocrite."

"The book is a germ carrier in the contagion of reading," says the blurb on the jacket, and for once the blurb is the truth.

### New York and Points East

TURN OF TOWN. By Robert Cortes Holliday. George H. Doran Company.

ROVING EAST AND ROVING WEST. By E. V. Lucas. George H. Doran Company.

BOTH Mr. Holliday and Mr. Lucas have what the classical writer called the "running pen"—what Mr. Samuel Weiler called "the gift of gab very gallopin'." Both—at this moment—have the same publisher for their latest packages of what does not seem to deserve a more respectful name than the "chopped feed of literature."

These short pieces, many of them well made to pass three minute periods of a reader's attention, are by no means suited for consecutive reading, for in these two books the reader is made to stop and start again as frequently as in a street car, or in the subway; and sometimes the jolts are disagreeable. There is a likeness between these two measures of comment ground almost to meal, but their flavor is not the same, and Mr. Holliday's pieces seem to have less nourishment in them, despite the personal note which he strikes so often.

For instance, in his remarks about "Writing in Rooms," he quotes Mr. Lucas, and by name; and frequently throughout his collection of obviously carved obvious cherry stones he spatters contemporary names about; very freely. His sprightly manner to often slips into an unpleasant sort of freshness of spirit. Now, one can be fresh as a rose or fresh as an egg of this date of the breakfast newspaper, or fresh as a May morning; and otherwise, one can be fresh as paint. Several of these pieces sound as fresh as the paint used lately by the house and fence artists who deliberately abstain from motives of economy, from mixing any dryer at all with their coloring. This lack of dryer was noticeable in some of Mr. Holliday's earlier books; and since he seems to hold fast to the courage of his methods, his style is fixed, presumably. Here is a little of it:

"Just off Longacre Square is a medley of offices, shop houses and handbox hotels whose names doubtless only a district messenger could recite in any number. The particular one for which we are headed is famous enough. . . . Here the 'Uncle Jack' of the American stage, Mr. Drew, for some time made his residence. It is always the stopping place in New York of perhaps the finest of our novelists, Joseph Hergesheimer. That mystical Indian gentleman, Mr. Rabindranath Tagore, has found it a not unworthy tent on his Western pilgrimages. And so on. You cannot be long in its rich little lobby without overhearing struck the high note of its distinctive clientele. 'Where do you open?' 'At Stamford. When do you close?' In the subdued light bare satin arms and enspiriting lengths of colorful stockings flash from the deep chairs. . . . A graceful hand opens a telephone booth to expel a smoking cigarette."

And so on, in Mr. Holliday's idiom. His talk about the late James Huneker is less tedious, but it is not often that he seems to say, very much. Mr. Lucas's grist comes through the grinder from a fuller hopper. He gives us in this book scraps from India, Japan and the United States. Five pages about falconry with Sir Umar Hayat Khan give in compressed description a striking picture in the open air. The chapter on Benares spills the fastidious traveller's aversion from dismal dirt and the wreckage of death. In Calcutta he could not find Rose Aylmer's tomb, but "The comely mausoleum of Job Charnock"

was discovered readily in t. John's graveyard—Job the Ganges pilot, hero of the incident that sings in the line: The tall, pale widow in mine, Joe, the little brown girl's for mine.

From India to America is a long jump, but he lands on his feet. His impressions began in San Francisco and ended in Coney Island, or thereabout. He found Americans worthy of several of his gentlest compliments. "Even in complex and composite New York I should say that simplicity is the keynote of the American character. It is in his simplicity that the American differs most from the European. Such simplicity is perfectly consistent with the impatience, the desire for novelty, for brevity, of the American people." And as to "the American face," "The average American face is, I think, cleaner than ours, and healthier. One sees fewer ruined faces than in English cities, fewer men and women who have lost self-respect and self-control." And as to clothes: "America is full of surprises, due to the uniformity of clothing and a certain carelessness which elevates comfort to a ritual. The man you think of as a millionaire may be a drummer," or the other way. A pungent and amusing chapter deals with "The Press." Says he: "Whatever bushel measures may be used in the United States, the concealing of light is no part of their programme. . . . Profusion is a characteristic of the American newspaper. There is too much of everything. . . . When it comes to choice of news, one cannot believe that American editors are the best friends of their country. I am holding no brief for many English editors; I think our papers can be common, too. . . . but I think that more vulgarizing of life is at present effected by American journalists than by English. There are, however, many signs that we may catch up."

And Mr. Lucas makes this penetrating remark about American women: "Their federacy almost amounts to a solid secret society; not so much against men, for men must provide the sinews of war and other comforts, but for their own satisfaction." And then: "Both sexes appear not to languish when alone."

Mary Hastings Bradley, author of "The Innocent Adventurers" (Appleton), is now deep in Africa on a hunt for gorillas and other sights of the jungle. Recent word reported her safe arrival in Cape Town, after a voyage on which Gen. Smuts was a fellow passenger. Cape Town seemed the most stunning place she had ever seen, and with intense expectations she was beginning the trip by rail which will take her, at times on foot, into the wildest parts of the Dark Continent.

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